

The Importance of Beginnings

Rosh Hashana

As the energy of time cycles through its phases, it reaches peaks which are specific to its seasons. The energy which lends itself to inspiring and re-vitalizing the "point of beginning" peaks at Rosh Hashana, the New Year. One who wishes to elevate and amplify his power of new creation, his ability to be always new and self-generating, should utilize the spiritual power of Rosh Hashana to the full. Let us delve into the idea of Rosh Hashana to discover the energies which are manifest then in order to be able to best use this opportunity. Strengthening the inspiration of the first phase of experience is the key to building the strength and stamina needed for the second, the phase of diminished inspiration.

Rosh Hashana is the beginning of the year. The spiritual forces operating at moments of beginning are unique. "*Hakol holech achar harosh* - Everything goes after the beginning": the entire course of any process is determined by its beginning. This is because a beginning is a conception, and conception represents the laying down of the genes which are the blueprint for *everything* which is built later. The spiritual rule is that the closer to the moment of conception, the more potent and critical the forces: a small injury to the human body may not be of major significance in an adult; a fetus during its development is much more sensitive to such an event; and a minute change to the genes may have the most far-reaching results imaginable.

At the moment of conception all details are being coded most potently; it is therefore the most critical moment. No subsequent moment can ever have the intensity and significance of that first moment. The flash of conception contains everything, all later development is simply a revelation of what was created during that first flash.

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Rosh Hashana is the conception of the year and the next ten days are its gestation. That is why these days are so critical to the whole year. That is why a person is judged for *the entire year* as he appears on Rosh Hashana - the personality as it exists then is the core; it will take supreme effort later to change. Change on Rosh Hashana is much easier - one can manipulate the "genes" of one's character then. People of spiritual knowledge take extreme

care to live perfectly on Rosh Hashana - the year is being conceived. Many have a custom not to sleep at least during the morning hours; they wish to lay down the genes of the year in consciousness, not oblivion.

What is the source of this special energy? The first Rosh Hashana ever, which of course must represent its true nature most powerfully, was the day of the Creation of man. That day of Creation was the world's first Rosh Hashana and its climactic event was the Creation of the human. That is why the day always retains its power to *re-create* man! When we genuinely and intensely decide to elevate our personalities on Rosh Hashana, become inspired to live the coming year as higher beings, we are using the day's deeply-rooted energy as the day of human creation. The day has the power to energize real change and help a person become unrecognizably different.

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There is an idea that Adam was created at the very place which would later be the *mizbeach* (altar) in the Temple. "*Adam mi'makom kaparaso nivra* - Adam was created from the place of his atonement". His very first moment of life was generated from earth which was gathered from all parts of the world but which was concentrated on the one spot which would later become the site of sacrifices - that activity which most powerfully atones and brings man close to the Divine. His moment of creation is at once the most intense newness possible and also contains the element of the most intense change possible - from sin to atonement, which is really new creation itself. Hence the unfathomable power of Rosh Hashana to help us become new. Little wonder that the mystical custom is to minimize sleep!

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The service of the day reflects this idea of reaching for the root. The order of prayer is based on *Malchuyos* (kingship), *Zichronos* (memory) and *Shofros* (*shofar*-blowing).

Malchuyos (kingship) represents the effort of renewing the root of all Creation and all service - establishing that Hashem's rule is absolute and primary. *Before* accepting the yoke of specific *mitzvos* we must accept Hashem's kingship in general, as expressed in the famous *mashal* (allegory) of a great king who was asked to decree laws for a country. The king agreed only on condition that the people first accept his sovereignty over them; only then would his laws be binding and meaningful. The root of Creation is Hashem's kingship, and so too is the root of all spiritual growth. This realization is the

most primary of all on Rosh Hashana and it requires a delving into the deepest level of *ratzon* (desire) during the prayer service to reach the consciousness of and desire for Hashem's complete rule.

Zichronos (memory) represents the idea of remembering in true spiritual depth the points of origin of the world and of the Jewish people and its destiny. This deep form of memory is a re-entering of the male phase of new conception - to go back to the initial flash or spark and re-live it vividly and literally. The root of *zachor*, "remember", is identical with "male". The connection should be obvious. Maleness is exactly that: a carrying over of the distilled essence of all previous generations in a seed which will form the next generation. The seed is a "memory" of the past. In fact the word "memory" and "seed" are numerically equivalent. The work of memory, re-living the flash of creation, is perfectly fitting and necessary for Rosh Hashana.

Shofros (*shofar*-blowing) indicates, along the lines we have been discussing, reaching for the heart, reaching for the root of the *neschama* and the personality. The essence of the *shofar* is that it has a voice but no words. The mystics explain that the voice is the root of speech and contains far more than the individual finite words. Words may convey information, but the voice conveys the person. This is why prophecy is referred to as "voice", not words: when Hashem tells Avraham to listen to Sarah's prophetic advice the verse says "*Shma b'kola* - Listen to her *voice*", not "Listen to her words".

Hashem tells the prophet "*Kra b'garon, al tachsoch* - Cry out in your *throat*, do not hold back"; prophecy is not from the mouth, the origin of words, but from the throat, the origin of raw sound (the end of that verse is: "*k'shofar harem kolecha* - raise your voice like a *shofar*"). The blessing we pronounce on hearing the *shofar* is "*lishmo'a kol shofar*", to "hear the *voice* of the *shofar*". The *shofar* is raw sound, a raw cry, and that is why it has the power to open the *neschama*. All the words in the world cannot convey the emotion of a scream of a child in the night. The *shofar* is that scream.

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Rosh Hashana correctly lived should leave one supercharged. The energy achieved should be so great that the rest of the year can be lived accordingly - not as a *continuation* but as a *constant experience of newness*. Spark must become flame and that flame must spark a new blaze; always. That is Jewish living. There is a mystical idea that being alive today because one was alive yesterday is called dying. Being really alive means that one's life is

generated today, not as a passive result of the past but as an explosion of newness now and always.

The Hebrew root *ani* meaning "I" has two derivatives, *ana* and *ayin*. The word *ayin* means "is not", *ana* is much harder to translate - it indicates an inexpressible pleading or longing as in "*Ana Hashem hoshi'a na*", the longing for redemption. These words, *ayin* "is not", and *ana*, intense hope for the future, also mean "from where" and "to where". When one asks "Where have you come from?" one says *me'ayin ba'ta*. When one says "Where are you going?" one says *ana telech* (or *le'an*). But if one stops to consider the literal meaning of these expressions, a most inspiring depth becomes apparent: *me'ayin ba'ta* - "From where have you come?" literally means "You come from nothingness". And *ana telech* - "Where are you going?" literally means "You are going to an inexpressibly great dimension beyond this".

Hebrew, the language of holiness, is pregnant with spiritual depth. The simple, mundane idea of a person arriving from some previous place is expressed in common Hebrew as the transition from nothingness to his present state (*yesh me'ayin* - something from nothing!) In other words, the spiritual grasp of this moment is that it is relative to the previous moment as existence compared to nothingness! *That* is newness! And from this moment to the next the explosion is so great that it cannot be translated! That is the striving of a spiritually sensitive person, to generate new inner life continually. Avraham Avinu says of himself "*Va'anochi afar va'efer* - And I am dust and ashes". Torah is never mere poetry, every nuance has infinite meaning. What is the meaning of "dust and ashes"?

The idea is this. Ashes are the bare elements left when a substance has been completely burned. "Dust" of the earth is the rich soil in which growth takes place. Avraham, who most profoundly represents the idea of newness, of being the father, the founder of the Jewish people, who forged a whole new way of living, sees himself as constantly incinerating what he has become in order to use those elements as soil for new growth. No element of his development is allowed to continue passively, here today because it was here yesterday. All of his being is distilled into a memory which is the nucleus for a new birth - constantly! That is the power of *chiddush*, self-generating newness, the source of spiritual life and growth.